Foreword EFGS - EUROSTAT

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The last few years have seen various international and national initiatives to build bridges between the world of geospatial information and that of statistical information.

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on 27 July 2011 recognized the need to promote international cooperation in the field of global geospatial information and therefore set up the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UNGGIM). UN-GGIM adopted decision 3/107 (see E/C.20/2013/17) at its third session, held in the United Kingdom in July 2013, which "acknowledged the critical importance of integrating geospatial information with statistics and socio-economic data and the development of a geospatial statistical framework".

The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF) currently being developed will provide an integrated and interoperable common method for geospatially enabling statistics and managing geospatial information at all stages of statistical production. It connects spatial information that describes our physical man-made and natural environment, and statistics that describe their socio-economic and environmental attributes. This framework has already proven useful for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2020 Round of Population censuses. Eurostat fully supports these global initiatives and their implementation at the European level. The implementation of the global strategy in Europe relies on methodological guidance developed through the GEOSTAT series of projects. Starting from the very concrete task of representing census data in a European population grid dataset (GEOSTAT 1) the GEOSTAT projects have gradually increased their ambition and scope by developing a model for a point-based geocoding infrastructure for statistics based on address, buildings and/or dwelling registers (GEOSTAT 2) or developing and testing the GSGF in the European context (GEOSTAT 3).

These projects benefitted from the fruitful exchanges of ideas at the annual conferences of the European Forum for Geography and Statistics (EFGS), funded by Eurostat. The main goal of the EFGS is to promote the integration of statistical and geospatial information and the use of geospatial information in decision making. The EFGS is a voluntary body comprising geospatial experts but also statisticians, researchers working in National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and experts from National Mapping and Cadastral Agencies (NMCAs). Countries outside Europe are also active in the EFGS, which aims to establish a global forum and good cooperation with UN-GGIM at regional and global level. EFGS became the official Observer Organization to UN-GGIM: Europe in 2015. EFGS also acts as a reference group for Eurostat and the project group for the GEOSTAT projects.

Both Eurostat and EFGS acknowledge that integrating statistical and geospatial information relies on strong methodological guidance to ensure the quality and comparability of geospatial statistics. This is why they warmly welcome INSEE's initiative to compile a handbook of geospatial statistics, based on a point-based statistical information system. They fully endorse the objectives of the handbook, namely to promote, develop and consolidate the use of specific statistical methods available to NSIs only within the framework of a point-based system. These methods, ranging from measuring spatial autocorrelation to drawing a spatially balanced sample, by way of managing confidentiality in a spatial context, fully completely within the scope of NSI activities. This tool, which focuses on practical examples and their implementation in R, will undoubtedly make the statistical production process, and the release and analysis of statistical results, more efficient.

We are convinced that this handbook will be useful for experts in all Statistical Offices and National Mapping Authorities worldwide who wish to know more about using geospatial information in statistics. The handbook will be useful for data producers, users and analysts, both experts and beginners, to identify the opportunities of data integration but also to understand the methodological challenges that the integration of the two at times very different data types brings about. We hope that it will inspire many experts to start using geospatial information in statistical production, and to use geospatial statistics in analysis and decision making.